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SUBJECT: MALIKI CAUTIOUS ABOUT BASRAH AND MOSUL SECURITY;
DESIRES ACCOMODATION WITH MODERATE SADRISTS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Patricia A. Butenis for reasons
1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki told MNF-I Commanding General David Petraeus and Charge d'Affaires Patricia Butenis that he was cautious about the security conditions in Basrah and Mosul, but contended that Basrah could come under Iraqi Provincial Control (PIC) by December. He was less optimistic about Mosul, where al-Qaeda has increased its presence and the local tribes are split. On the other hand, Maliki claimed he was close to a breakthrough with moderate Sadrists elements and some Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) in Sadr City. As he has done previously, he called for Coalition Forces restraint when apprehending rank-and-file JAM members. During a discussion about the FY2008 Iraqi defense budget, PM Maliki told General Petraeus he was scrubbing the figures closely looking for savings. PM Maliki concluded the meeting with a quick synopsis of his upcoming trip to the United States and the UN. END SUMMARY.

Basrah Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC)

¶2. (S) At their weekly scheduled security meeting on September 20, Prime Minister Maliki told MNF-I Commanding General David Petraeus and Charge d'Affaires Patricia Butenis that Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) could occur in Basrah by December or even sooner if three things happen: Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have control over armed groups and militia activity, citizens have basic security, and the current provincial governor is replaced. (Note: the governor was fired by the provincial council but has remained in office while he contests its jurisdiction in court. End note.) PM Maliki said Commander of Joint Forces Babakir and National Security Advisor (NSA) Rubaie had visited Basrah two weeks ago and both recommended a strong military response to the local violence, which they described as more criminal than political. Maliki said this new assessment meant that political reconciliation was less likely to attenuate the violence; therefore he tasked the ISF to develop military and police contingency plans for securing the province. General Petraeus noted that a militia presence remained in Basrah that also was a contributing factor beyond that of criminal activity and tribal feuding. Regarding the fired but still-serving provincial governor, PM Maliki revealed the governor may resign within a few days and accept a face-saving position as a senior Fadhila party advisor.

¶3. (S) General Petraeus urged PM Maliki to continue political reconciliation efforts in Basrah, which have worked well in other provinces like Anbar. He also suggested that senior border security commanders get briefings and instruction in

the latest security technologies. Maliki cautioned that Basrah had a more complicated security environment than Anbar--it does not have a homogeneous Sunni population, the tribal families are in disarray, and its border with Iran is quite porous. Maliki concluded that political reconciliation in Basrah would be much more difficult than Anbar.

Concerns about Mosul

14. (S) PM Maliki expressed concern about what he perceived as the deteriorating security situation in Mosul which had signs of an emerging ethno-sectarian conflict. He assessed the provincial governor, the local police chief, and the regional military commander as weak. If the situation worsened, he proposed establishing and activating a provincial operational command center which would reduce the governor's control over local security forces. He also intended to replace the current military commander with a stronger Sunni Arab officer who had ties to the Mosul area. Regarding emerging ethnic problems, he complained that some Kurdish militias were aggressively intimidating the regional ISF, which made the other local sheiks very nervous.

15. (S) General Petraeus agreed that al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) were making a strong effort to move into the Mosul area and re-establish control, but assured Maliki that Coalition Forces (CF) were effectively targeting their operations. He urged Maliki to bring the sheiks together and try to develop some kind of coalition or awakening, much like the CF had done in Anbar. He suggested that Joint Forces Commander General Babakir -- who is a Kurd -- might be a very useful asset in assuaging the concerns of the local sheikhs about

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Kurdish encroachment.

Attracting Moderate Sadrists

16. (S) Reiterating previous remarks he made following the Sadr cease-fire pledge in late August, PM Maliki asked General Petraeus for Coalition Force restraint during detention operations of rank-and-file Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) army. He claimed he was close to a breakthrough political settlement with JAM forces in Sadr City and needed some breathing room to conclude the agreement. Maliki said many of these residents had mistakenly put their faith in rogue JAM factions, but were tired of the violence and were now ready to cooperate with the GOI. Maliki requested General Petraeus share with the GOI the addresses of known JAM criminal elements whose names the CF had already provided to the GOI. PM Maliki said the ISF would arrest them and turn them over to MNF-I control. This would get these criminal elements off the street but would be an ISF operation, rather than a CF action.

17. (S) General Petraeus responded that the CF were trying to cool down their operations against JAM, but insisted on reciprocity. For example, the CF were still taking casualties from explosively formed projectiles (EFPs) and rocket attacks, which were almost certainly launched by JAM or rogue JAM elements. If they really wanted a cease-fire, concluded General Petraeus, they will have to deliver honestly on their pledge.

Developing Security Infrastructure

18. (S) Regarding security infrastructure, General Petraeus pointed out that senior U.S. officials were currently reviewing Iraqi Security Force (ISF) budget requirements for FY2008 which amount to almost \$16 billion. Of that figure,

the Iraqi government had already approved about \$7.5 billion and the USG \$2.0 billion in Foreign Military Sales (FMS). This left about \$6.5 billion unfunded. Although CENTCOM had recommended an additional \$3.5 billion FMS in an amendment to the President's FY2008 budget, General Petraeus said it would be difficult to get without a matching increase from the GOI -- at least up to \$10 billion total.

¶9. (S) Prime Minister Maliki acknowledged that point, but said he was looking into other alternatives like reducing overall defense expenditures. He wanted the National Security Advisor, plus the Ministers of Finance, Defense, and Interior to scrub the numbers closely and trim every bit of fat from the \$16 billion requirement. This would allow additional spending for agriculture, infrastructure, and citizen services. General Petraeus cautioned the Prime Minister that the most important citizen service in the near-term is security.

Upcoming Trip to the United States and UN

¶10. (S) When the Charge asked the Prime Minister about his upcoming trip to the United States and the UN, he said he had no major concerns. He added that discussions at the UN would provide a good opportunity for him to correct some misperceptions of Iraq and he intended to use it fully. During his visit to Congress, he said he intended to echo the themes Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus voiced during their recent congressional testimony. He also said he planned to visit the World Trade Center site to deliver remarks about the current threat of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

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